



# HUNTING THE FOX



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H

*unting*

THE FOX

*by*

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★

with illustrations by  
LIONEL EDWARDS



*Hunting in the days of James II*

# I . . THE PROFESSOR TALKS . . .

"DON'T talk nonsense, man," said the Colonel, getting redder and redder in the face. "It's the oldest thing in England. It's as old, as old as ——" Here he stopped to think of the oldest thing he knew. You could almost see him pause at Stonehenge. No—that was too new for him. Then a light came into his eyes. He had found it.

"It's as old—as old as fox-hunting," he roared.

"Well, after all," said the Professor mildly, "that's not so very old."

I thought the Colonel was going to have a fit. He slammed his glass down on the counter so heavily that old Joe was obviously reckoning what he could charge him for it.

"Not so very old?" he roared. "It's the oldest thing in the world. It's as old as Cain and Abel anyway. What the devil do you mean, sir?"

"Exactly what I say, as I always do. This tap-room is older than fox-hunting."

The Colonel glared round the room as if he expected it to dissolve under his gaze.

"Why, this room isn't three hundred years old."

"Quite right, nor is fox-hunting. Now if you'd said hare-hunting, or even ——"

The Colonel's face was rapidly becoming a rich magenta.

"You're always putting that stuff over me. If you want to go out with the harriers for the love of Mike go, and don't stand here trying to decry fox-hunting. Beagling's all right in its place, just as shooting and fishing are, but it's blasphemy to talk about it in the same breath as fox-hunting."

"I wasn't decrying fox-hunting. You know jolly well that I'd far rather follow the fox on foot than the hare, or I wouldn't put up with your confounded irascibility every time you make a mistake that no one but a child would make in facts of common knowledge."

As peace-maker (my invariable rôle) I thought it an opportune moment to intervene.

"We've just time to throw down another cherry-brandy before they move off," I said. "Same again, Joe. All the same, professor, I don't follow this story of yours about the precedence of hare over fox. I always thought ——"

"I wish you did. That's just the trouble. You neither of you know what true thinking is. It all depends what you call hunting. Do you call digging

the fox out with one hound, biffing him on the head with a spade, shooting him at sight and snaring him with nets, hunting? If you do, then I allow that fox-hunting is a pretty old sport."

"And when," asked the Colonel icily, "did they do that?"

"Well, Edward II's head-huntsman said of the fox, 'Exterminate this inferior class of animal.'"

"I don't believe it," said the Colonel.

The drinks arrived at the right moment.

"You'd better drink up," I said. "We shall be late."

Neither of them heard me.

"The trouble with you is," said the Professor, "that you can't read. It would be a waste of time to remind you of Chaucer."

"What the devil's Chaucer got to do with it?"

"Only to show you how your ancestors of 550 years ago behaved on seeing a fox."

"And how did they behave?"

"They certainly didn't dress up in scarlet on two-hundred-guinea hunters.

They didn't ride to hounds. They didn't need horse or hound. All they wanted was the nearest thing that would make a noise, an old pot or a horn, and the nearest thing that they could find to hit the fox with, and then, with sticks and pruning hooks and trumpets and any stray cur dogs they could find, they'd dash out of the farmyard shrieking: 'Out! Harrow! and weylaway! Ha, ha, the fox!' The 'tally-ho' of 1388."

"That's what Chaucer says?"

"That's what Chaucer



*"... with sticks and pruning hooks"*

says," repeated the Professor.

"And have you ever known a poet right about anything?" retorted the Colonel. "I suppose you've never heard of such a thing as poet's licence. Fancy going to a poet for historical accuracy." He dashed off his drink and slammed down his glass. "Same again, Joe." He chuckled with delight as he saw that the Professor was getting nettled.



"All right," said the Professor. "We'll leave the poets out of it, though I'd like to remind you that it was Sir Walter Scott scarcely a hundred years ago, who said,

"Who ever reck'd where, how, or when,  
The prowling fox was trapp'd or slain?"

"I don't think much of a poet," sneered the Colonel, "who thinks that 'when' rhymes with 'slain'." He raised his glass. "Cheers," he said.

The Professor raised his glass and went on: "Well—here's a seventeenth century Solicitor-General. I hope you'll accept evidence from a lawyer. This is what he said: 'It was never accounted either cruelty or foul play to knock foxes and wolves on the head as they can be found, because they are beasts of prey.' And I'd have you know that it was this same lawyer who said, 'We give law to hares and deer because they are Beasts of Chase,' so I was right when I said that hare-hunting is older than fox-hunting. Most packs only started hunting the fox by accident because hounds chased the fox by mistake for hare or deer. And it gave them a good run. Put that in your pipe."

"I don't believe it," snorted the Colonel. "Lawyers lie just as much as poets."

"Then you ought to read what old Twici said."

"Who's Twici? Another poet or lawyer, I suppose?"

"Not at all—Twici was that head huntsman of Edward II that I was talking about. The man who said of foxes: 'Exterminate this inferior class of animal.'"

"You sound as if you agreed with him."

"Nothing of the kind. Only I do like to see things in their proper perspective. People like you who pretend that fox-hunting is the oldest sport in the world are like those people who imagine that the Cotswold country has always been enclosed by stone walls."

"Well—hasn't it?" I interpolated innocently. I like to encourage the Professor. What's knowledge for, if you can't air it sometimes? The Professor turned on me for a change.

"What do you think a wold is—a small enclosed field?"

I played up to him as he of course wished. "Well?" I asked, "What is a wold?"

"Well—it's not enclosed. It's open downland. People always think that what is, always has been. The Cotswolds were as open as the South Downs in 1836. But let's get back to these foxes. Who do you think hunted the first pack of fox-hounds in England?"

"I suppose you'll tell us he's still alive?" interrupted the Colonel.

"No. It's funnier than that. It's as funny as the source of the Thames. Everybody's sure he knows, and no two people agree."

Again it was my turn. "Well, as it happens, I *do* know the source of the Thames. It's at ——"

"Oh, shut up," said the Colonel, "Let's keep to the point. Who *was* the first master of fox-hounds?"

"I don't know," replied the Professor. "There was a rush of claimants all about the same time. I'm rather inclined to plump for Thomas Boothby on the strength of his hunting-horn."

"What's his hunting-horn got to do with it?"

"It was inscribed—'Thomas Boothby, Esq., Tooley Park, Leicester. With this horn he hunted the first pack of fox-hounds then in England 55 years: born 1677, died 1752!'"

The Colonel made a calculation. "That means 1697 or earlier."

The Professor nodded. "Some say it was 1693. I don't think you'll find earlier evidence. But by the 1720's fox-hunting was fashionable. Do you

remember that savage letter of Pope's about the miserable life of the Maids of Honour who had to dance attendance on the Prince out hunting? 'To eat Westphalia ham in a morning, ride over hedges and ditches on borrowed hacks, come home in the heat of the day with a fever and (what is worse a hundred times) with a red mark in the forehead from an uneasy hat. All this may qualify them to make excellent wives for fox-hunters and bear abundance of ruddy-complexioned children.'"

"Yes," said the Colonel testily. "But who really was the father of fox-hunting if not this fellow Boothby?"

The Professor gave a glance at the clock and coughed. It was a bad sign.

"You asked for it, so I'm going to tell you if it makes us late for the meet," he said. "Then you can't plead ignorance in future."

I felt as if we were in a lecture hall, not a pub. He paused as orators will to rouse expectations, then he went on.

"Most people say that Hugo Meynell was the father of fox-hunting. He took over the Quorn in 1753 after Boothby died and hunted them till 1800, so obviously he wasn't the first, but he was the first master after the modern school, though John Warde of Squerries who hunted his own hounds for fifty-six years is usually regarded as the father of fox-hunting by the men of



*The Father of Fox-hunting*

Kent. But he was only born in the year that Meynell took over. Yet you'll never get Yorkshiremen to allow the claims of anyone outside the Holderness country. They're like you. They like to think of fox-hunting as being as old as Adam, or at any rate as old as their Norman ancestry in England.

"And it is certainly true that Edward I gave Adam de Everingham the patent roll to hunt the fox in the King's Chaces and Warren of Holderness in 1279."

"Then there was Sir Michael de Warton who hunted hounds in Holderness and died in 1665, and there was even a third master of the Holderness, William Draper, before the days of Hugo Meynell." He paused while the Colonel blinked.

"Well, of all the contradictory blokes. Why muddle us all up like this? First of all you say Boothby, and then you go diving back centuries earlier and bring out a whole lot of other names. Make up your mind. Who *is* the father of fox-hunting? You're getting tied up in knots."

"I'm not. There was a fellow called Sir Thomas le Strange hunting the West Norfolk in 1534, Lord Lowther hunting the Cottesmore in 1666, an Earl of Lincoln hunting the South Notts and Rufford in 1667, the Duke of Buckingham hunting the Sinnington in 1680, the Duke of Beaufort hunting the Beaufort in 1682, and Lord Arundell of Wardour hunting the South and West Wiltshire in 1690, but none of these was solely a fox-hunter."

"I wish I'd had your memory when I had to reel off the dates of English Kings," I said.

The Colonel once more ignored my interruption. He returned to the attack. "What do you mean—'none of these was solely a fox-hunter'?"

At this moment the horn in the road outside made one thing plain.

"They're moving off," I said. "You stay here and talk your heads off if you like. I'm fed up with the fathers. Give me the children."

I left them to it. Within a minute I was well among the "children," two hundred of them all trim and neat and keen as mustard, daintily picking their way to the first covert. The day had begun.

Then, as always happens with me, I remembered something too late. It wasn't much use my rushing back to the "Tabby Cat" to remind the Professor that he had missed something. When I was last in the Sun Inn, Bilsdale, I remember receiving irrefutable evidence that the Duke of Buckingham hunted that pack in 1670. And I'm sure it was fox—or was it?

I wish I could remember these things at the right time.

## II. . INTERLUDE ON SCENT . . .

"But they carried scent perfectly to this corner," said the Professor excitedly.

"How the devil do you know?" said the Colonel. "You weren't up with hounds. I looked for you at the meet."

The Professor coughed apologetically and flushed.

"The t-truth is," he stammered, "that I felt a bit of a chill coming on. I came by c-car."

The Colonel looked at him as if he were a criminal lunatic.

"You dare to tell me you came by *car*. You've been actually *following* in a CAR? Don't you know the first thing about hunting?"

The Professor, in spite of his chill, bridled.

"There were lots of cars following, and I don't see why I shouldn't see sport as well as you just because I'm not very well."

"If you're not very well the place for you is bed. If you are well you've no right to spoil everybody's sport by following in a car."

"I don't see how it's spoiling anybody else's sport if I follow in a car."

The Colonel spluttered: "You d-don't s-see how it's ——." It was his turn to stammer. He turned to me. "Why, the man's crazy. You talk to him."

"I suppose," I said, "the Colonel means that you've headed this fox, and now they can't pick up the scent again."

"But I couldn't possibly have headed him. I've not *seen* the fox."

"The possibility of his having sharper eyes than yours, and that he may have seen you didn't strike you, I suppose?" said the Colonel.

"Frankly, no. If he had crossed the road I should have seen him."

"Rubbish," said the Colonel. "Your car drove right across the very course that the fox would take. It was also giving off the most awful stench. You first turn him aside from the way he was going and spoil what looked like being a record point, and then you entirely destroy any chance of picking him up again with your filthy fumes."

"How far do you suggest that petrol fumes carry?" asked the Professor.

The Colonel bellowed his reply.

"It smells to Heaven."

"Yes, but how far sideways, on the flat?"

"About a mile."

"Well, that's just about the distance my car is from where hounds are casting now. I got out of the car at least a mile away, and at least an hour ago,

so that I should say that your theory is thin if not untenable." This only made the Colonel angrier.

"Why couldn't you say so at the start? I thought your car was hidden at the back end of the lane here."

"There are no cars at the back end of the lane. I've just come from there. I'm afraid you'll have to search for another reason for scent stopping."

The Colonel snorted. "That's easy. There may be a million reasons." He searched about for one and pointed to a girl in brown tweeds on foot. "You see that asinine girl there with the three terriers. Why, for the love of Mike, will women always bring their dirty tikes out to every meet?"

"I suppose they think they need exercise."

"Don't they know that if a cur dog gets on to a fox all scent immediately goes?"

I chipped in here.

"I didn't know that. Is it true?"

"There are a good many things you don't know about scent. Of course it's true. Would you have said scent was going to be good to-day?"

"I should not," I said. "It's cold, and cold is always bad for scent, it's sunny, it's dry, and the wind's in the East. My idea of a good scenting day is a grey, warm, muggy, damp day with the wind in the West and a feel of rain in the air."

"And yet scent has been well-nigh perfect to-day until it failed so mysteriously here."

The old huntsman came up. After ten years of retirement he still followed on foot.

"What's that I heard you say about scent, Sir?"

The Colonel turned to the new-comer. "Hello, George!" he said. "You're just the very fellow I want. Tell me, why should scent fail so completely here all at once after having been so good all day? You ought to know after fifty years of this country. We thought it might be cur-dogs or petrol fumes. Is it all the wet we've been having?"

The huntsman looked at him sadly. "The best scent of all is on waterlogged ground. You ought to know that, Sir. Scent's failed in this field a thousand times long before petrol and cars came along. The simple truth is that scent has never carried across this field in all the years I hunted hounds here. It's just no good casting. It's safe ground for fox. All the people round'll tell you the same. It's a sort of sanctuary. People talk about its being cursed or blessed



*A Check—Scent failed*

at some time. I can't explain it. It just happens. Some people say it's a peculiar soil. That's unlikely. If we knew a bit more about scent we'd be better able to tell where *not* to look for it. But scent's like a woman. The only thing you can count on is that you can't count on it. If by all the rules it looks right for a good scenting day there'll be no scent at all. If you expect none you'll as likely as not have the day of your life. I often say what a grand sport hunting would be if it weren't for scent."

Even the Professor laughed.

"You're like the fellow who said: 'What fun hunting would be if it wasn't for these damned hounds.'"

The huntsman looked up at him quickly. "And I've often felt like agreeing with that too, Sir. I'd like to meet the chap who described the hound as a wise animal. Give me a sheep for sense."

There was a very faint holloa miles back. . . . It was a good run, but nobody was fool enough to try to pretend that it was the same fox. The fox that reaches four-acre field is as safe as the malefactor who reached the Fridstool in Hexham Priory or clung to the knocker on Durham Cathedral's north door.

If you believe what any man tells you about scent you are the sort of person who makes fortunes for gipsies at the fair and tipsters at the Derby. And gipsies and tipsters have a chance of being right. People who really know about scent are as rare as water-diviners and just as inexplicable.

### III. . . . . MEMORIES . . . . .

THE Atlantic was at its most mournful. The intermittent cry of the ship's syren through the dense fog served to remind us, as if a reminder was necessary, of the insecurity of our hold on life and of the depressing pall that held us none the less surely for the soft clamminess of its grip.

In despair I left off trying to pretend that the wooden horse was real, and retired to the ship's library. I was not in the least surprised to see the Colonel and the Professor there. What did surprise me was the fact that they were no longer playing chess.

The Professor was studying a column of the three-days-old *Times* with a peculiar concentration.

"What on earth's he doing?" I asked the Colonel, *sotto voce*.

"You needn't whisper," said the Professor testily.

"Well, what are you looking at last Saturday's *Times* for? You've read it from cover to cover long ago."

"Last Saturday was the first Saturday in November, and I'm thinking of all the lovely places we might be in if we hadn't been such fools as to set out on this trip. I doubt if we shall see a single fox-hound in the whole continent of America. Listen to this: 'Opening meet: Knepp Castle.' What sort of vista does that conjure up?"

I shut my eyes.

"Leaves of deep gold on all the trees," I said. "Pink coats on a smooth green lawn with the grey battlements of a low castle behind. You in quiet but ugly knickerbockers and a Norfolk coat that would have suited Edward VII, arguing with the Colonel (who's in whipcord riding breeches, Harris tweed coat with leather in the shoulders and a long stick like an otter pole, and fishing flies in his hat), whether this stray hound is Boaster or Bashful."

"They're not in the least alike," said the Colonel. "And anyway Bashful's a bitch."

"So's Boaster," said the Professor.

"Don't talk rubbish," retorted the Colonel.

"And I see hounds moving off," I went on, "over the park, and a field about two hundred strong with at least two hundred shining black cars behind almost as glossy as the horses. And I see a big ditch and a sloping field leading up to a copse above Shipley Windmill where we never fail to find, and then a run northward over miles of small fields with rather beastly hedges in which the Professor gets stuck until the Colonel comes along and bursts a great gap for all the cattle to come through afterwards."

"What nonsense, I've never been behind the Professor in all the years we've followed, while as for making a gap, I've never broken a fence in my life. I may have fallen through one or two by accident."

The Professor wasn't listening. He was reading out loud: "'To-day: Warren House Inn.' That revives memories to me. Do you remember the hail-stones that made our cheeks bleed as we ran straight over the rough heather to the stone circle above Fernworthy and then had to shelter under the rocks on Kes Tor from the lightning? And the Colonel fell into a bog in the dark."

"Never in your life. I just slipped into one of those infernal peat crevasses

to get out of your clumsy way."

"That was the time we had to spend half the night trying to find Forester and Merriman."

The Colonel interrupted with a question.

"Where were the Berkeley?"

The Professor ran his eye up the list.

"Hampden Common."

The Colonel roared.

"You complete nit-wit. I said the Berkeley. Don't you know where Hampden Common is?"

"Of course I do. It is in Buckinghamshire."

"Well, how could it be in the Berkeley country?"

"It says Berkeley here. Read it for yourself if you don't believe me."

The Colonel snatched the *Times* out of the Professor's hands, and then jabbed his finger almost through the page.

"Read, man, read."

"All right, all right. 'Berkeley, Old—Hampden Common.' It's as I said."

"It's not as you said. There's all the difference in the world between the Berkeley and the Old Berkeley. One's on the Welsh Border, and the other's almost in London."

"Well, they shouldn't confuse us like this."

"There's no confusion at all. You profess to know such a lot about the history of hunting, and yet you don't know the difference between any two packs."

"I'd be glad to learn. As a *quid pro quo* for my dates let's have a lesson in places."

The Colonel was obviously pleased at his chance.

"Well, the Berkeley country was once over 120 miles long, and Lord Berkeley used to have four separate kennels—there was one at Charing Cross, one at Berkeley Castle on the Severn. I've forgotten where the others were. But they used to kill their foxes in Kensington Gardens."

"Having met, I suppose, at Oxford or some such place," sneered the Professor. "I suppose that's why they met at midnight, to give themselves a chance of finishing the same day."

"As they covered the whole breadth of England they wouldn't have a chance of finishing the same day. I remember my grandfather telling me (he lived at Bristol) that the old Lords Berkeley hunted this huge area right from



*The Old Berkeley*

the second half of the sixteenth century for at least sixty years. As a matter of fact the country wasn't divided up till about 125 years ago when the Old Berkeley started."

"Well, talk about my being confusing," said the Professor. "That means that the Old Berkeley is the new pack, and the Berkeley hunt the real Berkeley Country."

"Well, what's in a name anyhow?" said the Colonel. "The Berkeley hunt 350 square miles of Gloucestershire and the Old Berkeley hunt 200 square miles of the Home Counties."

It was my turn to look at the hunting appointments.

"Everything's in a name," I said. "Listen—'Cotswold: Stow-on-the-Wold.' What does that convey?"

"Grey stone walls," said the Colonel. "Little dips over green fields down to brooks that look very easy until you're in the middle of them. Yes, yes, you needn't remind me. Warm stone manor houses, with incredibly twisted chimneys and decorated finials and dormers in the flecked grey stone roofs, a trot along the green margin of an arrow-like Roman road, a sudden view over the whole Severn valley to the dim black mountains of Wales holding up the clouds."

Now the Professor had seized the paper again.

"By Jove, there's a meet at Boothby Graffoe. Do you remember the day when we ran endlessly along the side of that green hill, praying that we shouldn't go down into the big wet country below with its wide drains and heavy black ploughs, and how in the end we wished we had because when we went over the top we made a straight point over those great Lincolnshire fields that were full of hares right across to Blankney and then down into the hedgeless fens which no horse could jump. Golly, what a day."

"Must you say 'Golly'?" said the Colonel. "You seem to have carried all the most undesirable trappings of your prep-school days with you right through life."

"And you never seem to have lost one atom of the pontifical pomposity of the parade-ground: If I choose to say Golly, I shall say Golly."

I saw the usual row impending and weighed in with my own question.

"We seem to be roaming about all over the country, but why has none of us suggested a run in Lancashire?"

The Colonel's eye lit up.

"Because if you look at the hunting map you'll see that there are no packs

in Lancashire. There is no hunting west of the Bramham Moor. There are sixteen different packs in Yorkshire and not a single foxhound pack in Lancashire."

"Yes, but why?" I insisted.

"Oh! I suppose—I suppose—well, Yorkshire's the county of broad acres, and Lancashire's—Lancashire's industrial."

"Industrial be blowed," said the Professor. "What about the Trough of Bowland and the moors above Blackburn?"

"Well—then it's all grouse."

"I bet you can't remember the sixteen Yorkshire packs," I went on.

The Colonel was recovering his good humour.

"Drinks on it?" he said.

"Drinks on it," I repeated. "Go ahead."

"Zetland," he began.

"That's in Durham," said the Professor.

"Not all of it," answered the Colonel. "Don't interrupt: Zetland, Hurworth,



*"Yorkshire's broad acres . . ."*

Cleveland, Goathland, Farndale, Stainton Dale, Derwent, Middleton, Holderness, Grove, Badsworth, Bramham Moor, York & Ainsty, Bedale, Sinnington, and Bilsdale. Am I right?"

"I shouldn't know," I had to acknowledge. "But we can do with the drink. Let's get back to what we do know. What do you say to Sherborne Castle?"

The bond which drew the Colonel and the Professor together was mainly the fact that they were at school together in the Blackmore Vale country and used to cut games and class in order to follow hounds on foot.

They both started speaking together.

"The castle pond was always ——"

"Frozen over and we had to skate instead of hunt."

"And you always fell in and I had to ——"

"It was you who always fell in and I had to ——"

"Then we'd get mixed up with Miss Guest's beagles and ——"

"Get lost in the woods and find ourselves on High Stoy."

"Or Bishop's Caundle."

"And only get back just in time for evening chapel."

"You've forgotten what the country was like," I said.

"No, we haven't. There was bracken in the park, and the fields were wet."

"And there were badgers on High Stoy."

"I wish I hadn't started you on Dorset," I said. "I like stone wall country better than flying fences. I see the High Peak Harriers were at Monyash on Saturday."

"Well it's a jolly sporting county, anyway," I replied. "There's always a good chance of falling into a deserted lead mine or falling over the edge of the cliffs into one of the limestone dales."

"The Tynedale's fun, too," said the Professor. "Do you remember the day we started to walk the Roman Wall, and saw hounds driving a fox out of the clitter of rocks below?"

"And then left the wall," said the Colonel, "and found ourselves at night-fall in the middle of a wild Northumberland moor with no roads or tracks or houses for miles and miles."

"That was a good day," said the Professor.

"Almost as good a day as that with the Blencathra when we ran straight over Striding Edge in a snowstorm," said I.

It was the Professor's turn. "But these foot packs are the devil for anyone who isn't born in the fells. It just breaks my heart pounding up 2,000 feet.



*The Blackmore Vale*

I'm getting too old. Chanctonbury Ring's more my mark. Even 500 feet takes a bit of climbing, but it's worth it on Chanctonbury because once you're up you stay up all day and the foxes only run from gorse to gorse and the turf's always dry and almost as smooth as a bowling-green, and there's always a breeze coming up from the sea."

"There you go," said the Colonel. "Why on earth did you bring in that word? I'd almost forgotten that I was on the sea. What fools we are. Here there's no divine smell of wet earth, no rustling of one's feet through shining mahogany beech leaves, no rising steam of horses at covert side, no sweet music of horn, no grand chorus of hounds as they sight their fox, no scattering of turf as the field come tearing over the ridge and furrow."

"This is being lyrical with a vengeance," said the Professor.

"And who wouldn't be lyrical seeing all these well-loved names? Robin-a-tip-toe, Old Dalby, Raleigh's Cross, Stogumber Station, Old Ship, Plashett, The Three Horse Shoes, Three Ashes, Silchester, Chapel Brampton, Three Pigeons, Sheriff Hutton, Six Lane Ends, Cubley Stoop, Cat and Custard Pot, Fighting Cocks, Willow Garth, Trevilla Llangaron, England's Gate, Morley Toll Bar, Broad Halfpenny, Cricketer's Steep, Scrooby, Stoke Bruerne, Carn Brea, Willoughby Waterless, Hoker Water, Thatcher's Arms, Barking Fox, Sampford Courtenay."

"And now take a breath while I go on," said the Professor. "I can do better than that." He began to intone as if it were a chant. "Cuzzicombe Post, Piddletrenthide, South Zeal, Cobbler's Plain, Rous Lech, Upton Snodsbury, Dragon's Green, Cocking Causeway, Stretton Pastures, Perrott's Brook, Minshull Vernon, Batcombe Cross, Cherry Willingham, Cocked Hat Plantation, Scugdale Moor Gate, Standish Gate, Hinton-in-the-Hedges, Goosey Green, Merlin's Cave, Morton Maypole, Cold Harbour, Jackaments Bottom, Cloudesley Bush—there's all England in these hunting place-names."

The Colonel got up and looked at his watch.

"Well, the musical recital has made us forget our exile for a minute or two, but it makes it even harder to face the fact that we're rapidly leaving all that behind."

"If those syrens mean anything," said the Professor, "they don't mean rapidly. But I feel ready to go on with our game of chess if you do."

I took up the discarded *Times*. I had not realised how lovely was the island that I was leaving behind. More than ever I wished that I were on dry land with hounds coming up the lane. My eye caught the word "Capite," and

instantly I was back in the weald on a grey December day, passing along through the woods and over the upland fields, chasing first an old red fox who took refuge under the floor of a brick barn and later another who finished up under a hen-house. That was the day when I came almost on top of a completely exhausted fox just dragging his mud-bespattered, lean body over a grass field down to a drain where he rested, taking no more notice of me than if I were a bit of stick in the hedge. And in my sudden compassion I started walking to and fro across his trail to kill the scent. And after a quarter of an hour I found that hounds had changed foxes and gone off in the opposite direction.

And suddenly, it's queer the way the mind works, I was at the Kennels and there was the master in pink sitting very still and very upright with a half-circle of small boys in bowler hats and small girls in velvet caps all mounted on ponies.

It was the day of the children's meet.

"I want you," he was saying, raising his voice to drown the hounds still in kennel, "I want you to remember that you are a privileged people, privileged to ride over land that isn't yours. If you come out to hunt in order to jump I'd



rather you stayed at home. People who hunt to ride are no use to any pack. I want you to learn to ride to hunt. You've got your pony club, and in your own paddock you can jump fifty fences in an hour.

"Hunting isn't jumping unnecessary hedges, or riding better than your neighbour. It's taking thought for your neighbour's land, avoiding his freshly-sown wheat-fields, shutting gates where cattle are likely to stray, thinking of other people all the time. The best men to hounds are those who know hounds and follow hound work, who watch the way the fox is chased, not those who are 'thrusting' to be first in a steeplechase. You can keep all that for the Point-to-Point. When you get home to-night I want you to tell your parents what the hounds have done, and what you have done, whether the fox went down wind or up wind, whether he was ringing or going straight and what the point was. I want you to take out a map and mark in red ink the exact way we went, field by field, covert by covert, and by doing that you'll get your enjoyment twice over. For it's field by field, covert by covert that you'll learn to love England. You'll never learn to love it so well any other way."

And the fox that rose to give those children their first big day was the biggest, grandest, reddest fox I ever saw leaving covert side.

I saw him leap gaily straight out of the undergrowth feet up into the air, over the green ride like a salmon jumping, and two hours later with my tongue hanging out, my body mud to the top of my head, I was still hunting him and hoping he would escape. He was a rare sportsman.

And on the way home when dusk fell I had time to stand and gasp at the loveliness of the exquisite trceries of the bare boughs of the leafless trees against the clear cold sky. There was a touch of frost in the air that night. I'm always following hounds when I see my first wood anemones, pick my first snowdrops, violets and primroses. The earth's reawakening to life in earliest days of Spring is always associated in my mind with a great hunting day.

It's queer the way fox-hunting takes you. From the beginning of cub-hunting in those early days of September, when the white tendrils of mist linger lovingly round the stooks of golden corn to the mad March days of the Point-to-Point, run in a hailstorm with an accompanying forty-mile gale, I am always restless.

In the summer I'm well content to wait from Saturday to Saturday for my game of cricket on the village green, but in the winter months I keep my face glued to the railway-carriage window as I go up and down through the

Midlands to catch some glimpse of pink galloping away from Robin-a-tip-toe or Billesdon Coplow.

To me there is no scent comparable with the mingled smell of wet dead leaves, freshly upturned earth, the leather of the saddle, and the fragrant scent of the horses passing by.

To me there is no more thrilling sight on earth than that of a long red fox breaking covert and stealing away, followed first by an ominous stillness, then by the thin line of hounds picking up scent, then by the field thundering away from the wood-side churning up great turves in their anxiety not to be left.

To me there is no more joyous music than that of the hunting-horn, and of hounds in full cry.

Do you wonder, then, that I am full of nostalgia and home-sickness sitting in this ship's library, with the newspaper slipping from my hands, watching the ludicrous efforts of the Professor and the Colonel to concentrate on chess?

Chess? In the middle of the Atlantic? When, if we had any sense, we should be struggling along, up to the ankles in mud, cursing each other, the fox and the fading light, and thinking of hot baths and crumpets and eggs for tea and the heavenly sleep of the fully tired almost immediately after dinner.

You ask me for the most beautiful, the most moving passage in the English language?

I will read it to you now. Listen. Here it is: 'A fox found at Rougemont was marked to ground near Weeton. From Weeton Whin hounds ran well to Walton Head, but lost at Burton's Whin after a good gallop of twenty minutes. Finding at Swindon, they ran out towards the Punch Bowl, but turned down nearly to Harewood Bridge, went back across the Leeds road to Weeton Whin, and lost close to Swindon after a slow hunt of twenty-five minutes.

'A fox from the Punch Bowl went up the hill to a kale field near Lund Head, then turned down through the Punch Bowl, and was marked to ground near Kearby. From Ingham's Whin hounds ran round by Low Hall, back through Ingham's Whin, and out over the Haggs road, being stopped at the Rock Cutting after an enjoyable hunt of half an hour. This ended a busy day.'

That is the reticence of true literature, and moves me as deeply as the highest poetry. How I wish I were home again!

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